

# 1998 Wastewater Certification Program Operator Update

October 1998

Ecology Report

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## Ecology Proposes to Revise Certification Rule

Ecology is proposing to revise the "Certification of Operators of Wastewater Treatment Plants" (WAC 173-230). The purpose of the revision is to streamline administrative processes, provide the ability to use updated certification exams, and to simplify the rating system for classifying wastewater treatment plants. The rule will also be reviewed and revised for clarity to meet the Governor's Executive Order on Regulatory Improvement.

A "preproposal" notice was filed with the Code Reviser's Office on September 2 and published in the Washington State Register on September 16. That notice is the first step in the revision process.

## Proposed Changes

The proposed changes include recommendations of the Advisory Committee. The proposed revisions would:

- Eliminate the free retake of an exam. Ecology subsidizes one retake of an exam for each application fee. Eliminating this will help to cover the costs of administering exams. *continued on page 2*

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## New Professional Growth Cycle Has Begun

On January 1, 1998, a new professional growth reporting period began for most certified wastewater treatment plant operators. Each operator certified before 1998 is in this current cycle. The reporting period will end December 2000. Meeting the professional growth requirement is one of the conditions for renewing and maintaining a valid wastewater certificate.

Continuing education and training in the wastewater field are important to improving an operator's abilities, knowledge, and skill. It benefits an operator professionally and personally and also helps to provide the owner of the wastewater treatment plant with a more skilled operator.

## How to Meet Your Professional Growth Requirement

An operator may choose from the following four options to meet the growth requirement.

- Earn 3 credits or continuing education units (CEUs) in a related course or training. Courses or training repeated during a growth cycle will not count towards meeting the requirement.
- Upgrade by exam in Ecology's Wastewater Certification Program.
- Become certified or upgrade by exam in Health's Water Works Certification Program.
- Become certified or upgrade by exam in the WA Wastewater Collections Personnel Association's Certification Program.

Operators must document completed training or certification upgrades to the Wastewater Certification Program before December 31 of the last year of the reporting period.

- Add a condition that if the department uses an exam from an external source, the applicant must pay any fee associated with using the exam. This change makes it possible to obtain current examinations that will provide a better measure of an operator's competency.
- Use regular mail service to notify owners of wastewater treatment plants of pending revocation of an operator's certificate for failure to meet renewal conditions. The operator will still receive a certified mail notice of revocation.
- Revise the rating system used to classify wastewater treatment plants. The existing system does not address treatment processes being used today. The following simplified rating system based on treatment type and design flow is proposed to replace the point for each process rating system now used.

Treatment Type	Design Flow MGD	Classification
Primary	≤ 1	I
	> 1 ≤ 10	II
	> 10 ≤ 20	III
	> 20	IV
Lagoon (Non-aerated)	All	I
Lagoon (Aerated)	All	II
Biofiltration	≤ 1	II
	> 1 ≤ 10	III
	> 10	IV
Extended Aeration	≤ 5	II
	> 5	III
Activated Sludge	≤ 1	II
	> 1 ≤ 10	III
	> 10	IV
Wetlands	≤ 1	I
	> 1 ≤ 5	II
	> 5	III
Tertiary	≤ 5	III
	> 5	IV

- Eliminate language in the rule for conditions that have been met and add the changes made by the Legislature to the certification law (Chapter 70.95B RCW).

## What These Proposed Changes Mean to Operators

- A person who fails the exam will no longer be scheduled for a free retake. An application and fee must be submitted for each exam. Ecology may waive a portion of the application fee for an applicant retaking an exam.
- Each person would pay a test fee if Ecology uses an exam from an external source. This fee is estimated at \$20 per exam.
- Wastewater treatment plants may be classified at a different level. Plants are usually reevaluated prior to a new permit, the renewal of a wastewater discharge permit, or when undergoing an upgrade. If a plant were reclassified at a higher level, the operator would be required to be certified at a commensurate level. Ecology may offer a provisional certificate valid for a short period of time to give the operator the opportunity to apply for and pass the appropriate level certification exam.

## Opportunities to Comment on Proposed Changes

The rule revision process offers many opportunities for commenting on proposed changes. After reviewing the changes outlined in this update, please take the opportunity to give comments to Ecology. Write or email your comments to Myra Barker, Wastewater Certification Coordinator. The mailing and email addresses are listed on page 4 of this update.

As part of an effort to involve operators and owners of wastewater treatment plants, the proposal will be presented and discussed at operator Pacific Northwest Pollution Control Association (PNPCA) meetings statewide. Public workshops and hearings will be held in the spring of 1999.

## **Operator Certification Rule Revision Timeline**

The process for revising a rule involves many steps. In September, the initial filing with the Code Reviser's Office and subsequent publication in the Washington State Register was one of the first tasks completed.

A letter outlining the proposal and a copy of the "Preproposal Statement of Inquiry" was mailed to each wastewater treatment plant in early September. This update is to inform operators of the proposed changes.

The opportunity to comment will continue through the public workshops and hearings. July 1999 is the earliest date that changes would be implemented.

## **Y2K – Is Your Treatment Plant Ready?**

Y2K - Year 2000, RTC - real time clock, and BIOS - basic input output system. These acronyms and the words associated with them have worked their way into daily conversations and have become the main focus of work for many people and organizations.

How will embedded computer chips affect the operation of a wastewater treatment plant? Will computer hardware or software or electronic systems malfunction when the date changes to 2000? Will there be a failure in the control, monitoring, and operating systems at a plant? Will public health and the environment be endangered? These are just a few of the questions that managers, operators, and owners of wastewater treatment plants are asking and answering.

EPA recommends a 6-step approach to achieving Y2K compliance. The steps include awareness, assessment, correction, contingency plans, testing and validation, and implementation. They recommend implementation by September 30, 1999, while other groups are recommending a June 30, 1999 implementation date.

The following are just a few of the many sites on the Internet that offer more information on the Y2K issue, plans, and compliance.

[www.y2k.gov](http://www.y2k.gov)

[www.epa.gov/year2000/ow](http://www.epa.gov/year2000/ow)

[www.wa.gov/dis/2000/y2000.htm](http://www.wa.gov/dis/2000/y2000.htm)

[www.mrsc.org/infoserv/y2kbib.htm](http://www.mrsc.org/infoserv/y2kbib.htm)

[www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/mks/yr2000/y2khome.htm](http://www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/mks/yr2000/y2khome.htm)

## **Wastewater Operator Certification Program Advisory Committee Report**

### **September 17 Meeting**

The Advisory Committee met in Lacey on September 17. The meeting focused on reviewing the rule for proposed changes to the certification rule. Members spent the day discussing each section of the rule and the changes that needed to be made.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee agreed with the draft rule language for eliminating exam free retakes, adding a test fee, and changing the type of mail service used to mail notices to employers or owners of wastewater treatment plants of operators who's certificates are in revocation.

The committee reviewed the two types of rating systems for plants that the subcommittee on classifying wastewater treatment plants had worked with. One system is based on points assigned to each treatment process with points for lab tests and computer systems. The other system is based on treatment type and design flow. Members recommended the simplified rating system based on treatment type and design flow that is outlined on page 2 of this update.

### **Committee Members**

The members of the committee include Rogena Johnson, City of Goldendale; Russ Glaser, Clark Public Utilities; Jill Parker, Evergreen Rural Water; Jim Robins, Douglas Co. Sewer District #1; Chris Sheridan, City of Edmonds; Tim Pelton, City of Spokane; Joan Thomasson, Alderwood Sewer & Water District; Randy Casteel, Kitsap County Public Works; Cheryl Bergener, Water Works Certification Program; Melodie Selby and Myra Barker, Ecology.

There are two openings for representatives to the advisory committee. A certified Group I operator from western Washington and a sewer district commissioner representative are needed for the advisory committee. Anyone with those qualifications is encouraged to write a letter of interest to Myra Barker.

## Certification Q & A

**Q:** I would like to upgrade my Operator-in-Training certificate to a Group I. Is there an application deadline?

**A:** No. Submit your application and fee for upgrading your certificate when you meet the minimum requirements of a high school diploma or GED and one year of experience in the operation of a domestic wastewater treatment plant.

**Q:** I just became certified by passing the exam in October. Do I need to renew my certificate?

**A:** Yes. A certificate is valid from the date it is issued until December 31 of that same year.

**Q:** I just completed some training. Did the sponsor send in the information to the Certification Office?

**A:** It's your responsibility to document the training you complete to meet your professional growth requirement. Most training sponsors do not send the information to the Certification Office.

**Q:** How and when do I send in my training information?

**A:** Either fax or mail a copy of your certificate. The certification should include your name, the course title, the date you completed the training, and the credits or hours you earned.

All operators are encouraged to send in training documentation as soon as the training is completed. You must submit your documentation before December 31 of the last year of your professional growth reporting period to be eligible to renew your certificate for the next year.

**Q:** When do I have to meet my professional growth requirement?

**A:** If you were certified before January 1998, you must meet the requirement before December 31, 2000. If you became certified after January 1998, you must meet the requirement before December 31, 2003.

### CERTIFICATION EXAM CALENDAR

Exam Date	Application Deadline
2/1/99	12/26/98
6/7/99	4/30/99
10/4/99	8/27/99

### For More Information Contact

Myra Barker
Wastewater Certification Program
PO Box 47696
Olympia WA 98504-7696
800-633-6193 or 360-407-6449
Fax 360-407-6426

### Want to Contact the Certification Office by Email?

Ecology's website address is [www.ecy.wa.gov](http://www.ecy.wa.gov). Myra's email address is [mbar461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:mbar461@ecy.wa.gov)

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